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Viewing cable 06TELAVIV2788, KNESSET SPEAKER SAYS ISRAEL MUST REACT STRONGLY TO

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06TELAVIV2788	2006-07-14 11:51	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Tel Aviv

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002788

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/14/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#)
SUBJECT: KNESSET SPEAKER SAYS ISRAEL MUST REACT STRONGLY TO
HIZBALLAH ATTACK

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik told the Ambassador July 12 that Israel must react strongly to Hizballah's July 12 kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers and killing of eight others in its cross-border attacks that day and that Israel cannot appear weak. She expressed hope that the international community, especially the Europeans, will respond strongly against Hizballah's actions. The Ambassador said he understood the need for Israel to react, but stressed that Israel should focus its response on Hizballah and avoid harm to civilians that could cause the Lebanese public to rally around Hizballah and cause Israel to lose support from the international community. He emphasized that the more highly-focused the Israeli response is, the more likely Israel can maintain international support for its response. The Ambassador raised legislative issues with Itzik as well, reported septel. Itzik was joined by her diplomatic advisor, Ambassador Ya'akov Levy, and MFA North America Division chief Dan Arbell. End summary.

Itzik: Lebanon Should be Held Responsible

2. (C) In their first meeting since Itzik became Knesset Speaker, Kadima MK Dalia Itzik told the Ambassador that "(Israel) will react strongly" to the Hizballah actions of July 12, and that Israel cannot appear weak. She said that the GOI had previously received "hints" of a Hizballah attack, including an attempt to kidnap IDF soldiers. She commented that "(Hizballah) wants to show that they can do this." Accurately characterizing herself as "not in the

right wing," Itzik assessed that the Israeli public questions whether Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon was seen as a weakness by Hizballah, and reasoned that "it's about time to react.... the game is finished." Itzik also criticized Syria for its continued involvement in Lebanon. Diplomatic Advisor Levy added that Israel cannot "absolve" the Lebanese government of responsibility for the Hizballah actions. He said that the GOL should have deployed its forces in the south of Lebanon. Itzik echoed Levy's assessment that the GOL should be held responsible. She called on the USG to issue an immediate statement that the USG holds the GOL responsible for the safety of the kidnapped IDF soldiers.

13. (C) The Ambassador said he understands Israel's need to react, but emphasized that Israel should focus its response on Hizballah and avoid collateral harm to civilians in order to prevent the Lebanese public from rallying around Hizballah and to ensure international support for Israeli actions. He noted that the recent IDF bombing of the electrical plant in Gaza had cost Israel significant international support. Itzik responded that Israel has "no interest to widen" the conflict, but she commented that Hizballah has "dared too much" and that Israel can not ignore this. The Ambassador said he understood that the GOL was to have a cabinet meeting that day and that Lebanese PM Siniora could make a statement criticizing the Hizballah actions. The Ambassador said it was important that Israel not take steps which make it more difficult for Siniora to win support for a strong statement putting pressure on Hizballah.

Waiting for the EU

14. (C) Itzik expressed concern about how the international community, and especially the Europeans, would react to Hizballah's actions. She commented that Israel would have to "work on" obtaining a satisfactory response from the EU and noted her desire for strong U.S. and EU statements on the current crisis. The Ambassador assured her that the White House would soon issue a statement. During the meeting, Itzik asked her assistant to place a call to the EC Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner to discuss any European response. The Ambassador said that the Hizballah actions might be an opportunity to elicit an EU decision to designate Hizballah as a terrorist organization.

Knesset Role

15. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's query, Itzik said that the Cabinet alone can approve any MOD military operations in Lebanon, and that the Knesset has no formal role. She added, however, that any group of at least 40 MKs could request that PM Olmert come before the Knesset to address any issue. Itzik said that while the Knesset is scheduled to go on recess as of July 20, lasting until mid-October, she expects Knesset members will call for special plenary sessions in light of the current situation. (Note: A special Knesset plenary session during the summer recess can be called by 25 MKs or by the Government. End note.) She noted that Knesset committees would continue to meet, in any case.

Bio Note

16. (SBU) Despite the day's events, Itzik seemed relaxed, joked, and asked the Ambassador questions about his family. Her English is excellent. She commented at the beginning of the meeting that she left the Labor Party along with Ministers Shimon Peres and Haim Ramon, to join Kadima when then-PM Sharon still headed Kadima. Itzik unenthusiastically remarked that she is "satisfied" with Kadima.

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JONES